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## THE TABERNACLE.

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A peculiar interest belongs to this comparatively small structure on account of several circumstances which render it unique in character. It was the earliest of which we have any positive record, as having been erected for the worship of the true God, and, therefore, was not modelled after the specimens of which remains exist to the present day; especially in Egypt, supposing these to have been extant at that time; but was constructed in accordance with explicit and minute directions by Jehovah himself, accompanied with a pattern exhibited to Moses on Mount Sinai. It also differed from all other temples in being movable, and was actually transported in detached portions for a period of forty years of migration. Moreover, as might have been expected from these singular facts, it was of the most ingenious and yet practical style, both in plan and workmanship. The biblical description of it, the only original source of information, except such hints as oriental analogies and the requirements of the case suggest, although occupying two long chapters, is remarkably concise, and yet sufficiently definite to enable the careful expositor to reconstruct it complete. True, great diversity of opinion has existed among archæologists on this head, and almost all have despaired of any rational solution of the many problems which present themselves in the account and its interpretation; but the present writer at least believes that all these have at last been satisfactorily adjusted both with the statements of the text, and with the known habits of the times, the region of country, and the demands of use and consistency. The purpose of this short article is not to trouble the reader with the details of this elucidation, but merely to notice, in a historical manner, certain salient features which can be readily understood and

appreciated by all who have given attention to the subject. Incidentally it may be remarked that the study, more or less profound, of the theme, even down to the present day, is evinced by the fact that no less than twenty monographs upon it, some of them highly elaborate, have been published, during the last three centuries, exclusively devoted to this structure as a whole, and innumerable others to its immediate accompaniments. We may also premise that the success which now appears to have crowned these efforts is a specimen of the improved results of modern methods of investigation, as well as an omen of the probability that similar, if not all, difficulties in the sacred volume will at length be cleared up. Biblical archæology has certainly entered upon a new career of triumph.

The first cardinal fact which we here mention, as adapting the central erection to the nomadic necessities of the people for whom it was designed, is the distinction, generally overlooked, of the *mishkan*, or "dwelling-house" base, and the *ôhel*, or "tent" superstructure. The former, being the wooden walls on the sides, gave solidity and capacity to the building, while the latter, being the canvas roof, afforded a light but effectual protection from sun and rain. The method and means of combining these two, no less than of constructing each of them, have been very inadequately treated by most critics and writers on the subject. Fergusson, an architect himself, was the first to perceive that the roof, of course, must have had a peak, as every tent-maker knows and practices; but his mode of joining and applying the curtains of which this covering consisted is an obvious failure, both as to dimensions and utility; for he is compelled to extend them as wings far beyond the bounds of the walls, and at last makes a sad gap in the roof directly over the precious vail! Besides, nobody suggested any way of fastening the roof to the walls, until Paine discovered that the "taches," absurdly understood as designating *S-hooks* for attaching the two sets of goats-hair curtains together (instead of a substantial and close stitching together, like that of the breadths themselves), were *knobs* in the walls for buttoning down the edge-loops securely over the eaves, thus preventing all

drip inside. In like manner he showed that the coats of badger-skin and of ram-skin were a perpendicular outside sheathing of the walls, and not a clumsy and useless blanket on the roof, intended to stop the aforesaid leak!

As to the disposition of the "boards" (rather *planks*) of the walls themselves, the great puzzle was how to construct each "corner-board" out of a single cubit-and-a-half-wide plank (like all the others), so as to make up ten cubits for the rear out of these two and the six other planks. No plan except the one devised by the present writer accomplished this feat; and it may be added, none but his succeeds in getting all the requisite sockets duly under the planks without confusion and interference. Especially has nobody before him expounded the proof-text on this point as to the bars and rings (Exod. xxvi. 24) in any consistent or intelligible manner. The "corner-boards" are the key to the whole situation.

Paine likewise was the first to suggest the use of the sixth or surplus breadth of one of the roof-curtains, although he plainly contradicts the text (Exod. xxvi. 12) by wrapping it across the rear gable only. It was he also who first gave any good reason for sewing the eleven breadths into two large sheets, namely, because they were spread double, like the "fly" over a modern tent for better shedding the water; but here again his curtains misfit in length, because he makes the rear twelve instead of ten cubits broad by his mistake in the corner-boards.

But even a greater trouble with interpreters has been how to dispose of the inside or colored curtains; for until Paine none of them could make these fit, in whatever way they might be stretched. Here once more Paine's ingenuity was of service, by suggesting that they were sewed together end-wise, and that they ran double along the walls, instead of being hung (by some unknown attachments) overhead, where they would soon lose their beautiful colors by the wet. As each compound length would thus be exactly twice as long as the circuit of the three walls, Paine shrewdly suggested that they must have been *fulled in*, as folds in curtains usually are; but how this could be done without disfiguring the cherubs embroidered on them he

did not expound. He, too, for the first time, has exhibited a rational mode of distributing the three colors (blue, purple and crimson), by having them woven in cross-stripes of wool on a white linen foundation of warp or longitudinal threads, adopting (as he honorably acknowledges) a private hint to that effect from the present writer; but he gives no explanation of the proportionate width of these stripes, nor any reason why they are invariably named in this precise order, nor what relation they hold to the cherubs upon them.

Advancing now into the interior of these sacred apartments, we are met with numerous questions as to the form, construction, adjustment and significance of the various articles or pieces of furniture, both decorative and useful, which they present or contain. Most conspicuous of these are the cherubic figures already brought to notice as ranged around the walls like a cordon of sentinels or guard about the abode of the divine Majesty. On a careful estimate their total will prove to be an exact multiple of seven, the sacred number, both in the holy and the most holy place, and consequently likewise in the two combined. Moreover, by a coincidence too remarkable to be accidental, we shall find the cherubs as well as the colored stripes on which they are represented, as well as those with which they are interspersed, all occurring in exact harmony with the boards of the walls on which they hang, and precisely opposite each other on the two side walls, notwithstanding the necessary reversal of the direction of these last in the continuous series; and this is happily brought about by the same "corner-boards," which from a stumbling-block have been converted into a stepping-stone to the most satisfactory results. Again, the length required for the woolen loops, on which the curtains are suspended, is thus ascertained; and it will be discovered to be mathematically exact in order to fulfil that striking but at first seemingly unnecessary injunction, several times repeated, "See that thou hang the vail under the taches;" for it thus turns out that the four-cubit-wide curtains, added to the single cubit of a perpendicular to the triangle which the loops constitute in order to stretch the blue stripe for forming a smooth ground for the gold-threaded cher-

ubs, make up the five cubits demanded for the height of the vail, like that of all the other doorway screens. Furthermore, the number of pillars required for the successive entrances, and the space of the passages between them, gradually diminishing from the outermost to the innermost, as propriety and usage approve, as well as their purpose of due and equable support, without interfering with the sockets of the wall-planks or concealing the cherub-figures, vindicates not only the whole arrangement, but also the presence or absence of the rods or "fillets" by which they are kept apart and at the same time together, and the number and position of the hooks (not otherwise specified), in precise accord with the statements of the sacred text. Such a series of agreements is a cumulative and conclusive argument that the minutest details and extreme concinnity have at last been authoritatively expounded.

The cherubim themselves have been a standing riddle among archæologists, as to their form and still more as to their significance. The fact that on their first mention in Scripture, where they appear as guardians at the gate of Eden forfeited, they are called (in the original) "*the* cherubim," shows that they were already well-known in the time of Moses, and accordingly we find figures of this sort freely delineated on the Egyptian monuments. From the visions of Isaiah (where they re-appear under the title of *seraphim*), and more copiously in those of Ezekiel, we gather that they were substantially human in shape, but with the fore-legs and feet of an ox; that they had, besides human hands, two pairs of wings, one for clothing, and the other for flight (in Isaiah an extra pair for veiling the face); and were four-faced, as a man (the proper front), a lion (on the right), an ox (on the left), and an eagle (behind), all of course upon a single head. Those on the curtains were doubtless with both sets of wings closed, and with arms folded, as the panels were too narrow to contain them otherwise, while those on the sacred vail were probably flying, and those on the ark were certainly with extended wings. There is no authority for supposing that any of those in the tabernacle were kneeling, although this posture is sometimes depicted on the Egyptian monuments; and

the *living creatures* (A. V. most unfortunately "beasts") of the Apocalypse occasionally assume that attitude. As to their symbolization we may assume that they were not intended to represent any actual being (especially not the glorified state of Christ or the saints — a grotesque and even shocking thought to us), for then they would have been idolatrous ; but were, as we conceive, merely imaginative embodiments of the four leading attributes of Deity in the physical world according to the unscientific, but really profound and correct, notions of the Hebrews ; namely, *intelligence, power, constancy and rapidity*. Accordingly they are (especially in Ezekiel) the bearers of Jehovah's throne ; and they correspond essentially to what we term cardinal "laws of nature," *i. e.*, forces acting for a definite purpose uniformly and instantaneously. In this light the location of the two upon the lid of the sacred ark is preëminently fitting as the custodians of the *divine* law, nature thus corroborating revelation.

In this connection we may not inappropriately pause a moment to correct a common error, which confounds these symbolical forms with angels ; whereas the latter are actual beings, who temporarily in Scripture assumed a human body, but were invariably *destitute of wings*, notwithstanding the idealism of poets and the delineation of painters and sculptors. The common pictorial representation of the cherubim as beautiful young "cherubs" is equally devoid of foundation. They were essentially *animal* forms, as their analogues on the Egyptian and Assyrian monuments abundantly show, no less than all the scriptural portraitures.

Inasmuch as the official garb of the sacerdotal order is part of the prescription in the cultus of the tabernacle, this paper would be incomplete without some allusion to it. It was in fact but an improved fashion of the ordinary dress of orientals, consisting essentially of the tunic or shirt, with the invariable girdle for the waist, and the skull-cap for the head, but omitting the sandals on account of the sanctity of the edifice, and adding drawers for the sake of decency. The high-priest had an extra robe or surtout fringed with bells and tassels, an ornamental ephod or cape, sustaining the breastplate as a pouch for

the mysterious Urim and Thummim, a turban about the head, bearing the gold plate with its inscription significant of consecration to Jehovah's service.

The furniture or apparatus for the two sacred apartments, as well as for the exterior court, is likewise minutely described in the Scripture account; but for its elucidation, which would require great detail, we content ourself with referring the reader to our book so often alluded to above.

On one other point, however, of a general character we may be indulged with a little amplification, namely, the gradually increasing sanctity of the successive inclosures. The great mass of the Israelites were wholly excluded from the sacred precincts, and privileged characters among laymen were alone allowed to enter even the outer (and only) court with any considerable degree of freedom; while (male) worshipers could only do so for purposes of special sacrifice. The Levites were admitted to this at all times as assistants of the sacerdotal order, but under no circumstances could they enter farther, except to carry away the frame-work and fixtures of the tabernacle itself, together with the sacred utensils, after these had been properly dismantled and covered by the priests. The ordinary priests again went into the holy place, as a regular thing, but twice a day, namely, at the hour of the morning and evening sacrifice (*i. e.*, the one offered on the brazen altar outside), in order to extinguish and trim or else to light the lamps in the candelabrum, to change the shew-bread (once a week), and to burn incense on the golden altar. The high priest on the day of annual atonement only went (according to the rabbins, several times) into the most holy place, but in plain linen clothing (to denote humility), for the purpose of sprinkling the blood around (not upon) the mercy-seat of the ark. In all this graduated seclusion we perceive a strong contrast with the synagogue of later times, which was the precursor of Christian churches, where full liberty of access prevails for all classes and persons, because no special Shekinah of the divine presence is ever visibly there vouchsafed, and no Levitical services are held therein. The one great and final Sacrifice has been offered once for all, in the



person of the supreme High Priest himself; each truly regenerate individual is a priest for himself or herself; the prayers of the saints are the daily incense; and every pious heart is the divine abode. The original model of the tabernacle is reserved for the disclosure of the heavenly world.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a copious elucidation of everything relating to the subject the reader is referred to the writer's full work entitled "The Tabernacle of Israel in the Desert," published by Harris, Jones & Co., Providence, R. I.; 1888, square 8vo; with a portfolio of colored plates.